

THE ECONOMY OF INDO-CHINA

well as the unscrupulous character of the *metayer*, makes this a very risky business. These loans are repayable at harvest time. In kind, unless there is a poor crop. In which case repayment is delayed a year. The Annamite, like all farmers, invariably finds the weather Intolerable and conditions Impossible for repayment.

The early colonists had no appreciation of the labour problem. One author, in 1900, wrote to encourage colonization in Tonkin:

As to native labour, it suffices to compare the number of taxpayers with the number of non-taxpayers who are from five to twelve times as numerous, to be sure that the latter will gladly accept hire.¹

Good relations with the native officials would have solved some of these labour problems. The mandarins had means of coercing their compatriots that the French could never have at their disposal. Unfortunately certain French colonists only too often went out of their way to show disdain for native officialdom, and they, in turn, would refuse their aid, preferring not even to go near the European plantations.

Many colonists felt that the administration should supply them with labour, since the government had a political and fiscal interest in advancing French colonization. Edicts to insure the police a knowledge of what natives were employed on a plantation simply served to facilitate the tracing of criminals who often hired themselves out as a means of escaping detection. Measures designed originally to protect the employer, by forcing a labourer to have a card of identity, miscarried in practice. Employers strongly objected to having a servant extracted from their service simply to serve his term in prison, and they saw in the Identity card a purely fiscal exaction. There was much red tape. In

connection with this card. And, In addition, the colonist, like the Annamite, preferred that the government should remain In Ignorance of the number of his employees lest this knowledge be later related directly to taxation. When the colonist was made intermediary for the tax payments of his native employees, there was naturally a suspicion that he pocketed some of the proceeds. Employees easily escaped fiscal pressure by claiming that they had already paid taxes to their employers, who could as easily deny it without running any risk of verification. In either case the administration felt itself to be the loser. It must be remembered that the Ky-dong conspiracy² was conceived and almost succeeded under cover of the plantation system. One colonist gave more trouble than ten thousand natives, from the adjooials-

¹ Grevexath, A., *IS Agriculture en IndocMne* (Paris, 1900), p. 48.
^a Cf. below, p. 331.